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VA'ERA

SHABBAT MEVARCHIM



Daf Hashavua

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Shabbat ends in London at 5.16 pm  
 Rosh Chodesh Shevat is on Wednesday

To honour the 10th *yahrzeit* of Rev Alex Ginsburg by his loving grandchildren  
 Avi, Elisheva, Aaron, Naomi, Harry, Felicity, Beatrice and Alex

Journeys with  
 the Prophets:  
 Part 14

**The Book of Judges (Shofetim) Chapters 6-8**

by Rabbi Dr Moshe Freedman, Northwood United Synagogue

**Summary:** After the death of Devorah, a reversion to idolatry triggered a period of Midianite oppression. Gidon (Gideon) was appointed to combat both the physical threat and the spiritual corruption.

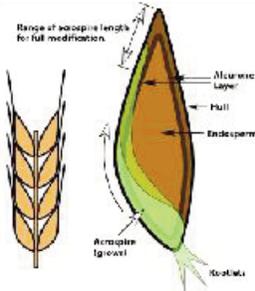
**A Deeper Look:** In an act reminiscent of Avraham, Gidon smashed his own father's idols together with those belonging to other Jewish families. Gidon then needed to raise an army to fight the hostile nations of Midian and Amalek. Yet for a Jewish army to be effective, its collective heart must be as strong and true as its sword. G-d told Gidon to bring prospective recruits to drink from a watering hole and to separate those who lapped the water with their hands from those who kneeled to drink. Rashi (d. 1105) explains that those who kneeled were used to doing so for idol worship, rendering them unsuitable to fight.

Gidon heard someone relating a dream that barley bread was roasting in the Midianite camp. Rashi notes that the barley bread symbolised a type of *mincha* (meal) offering (called the *omer*) which was made from barley and offered on the second day of

Pesach (Vayikra 23:9). Whereas other meal offerings are offered by an individual (ibid 2:1), the *omer* is a communal offering. Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk (d. 1926) elucidates the symbolism of the dream – Midian could not be defeated by individuals but only by a people joined together as one unified community.

After a miraculous victory, using an army that initially constituted only 300 men, Gidon executed the Midianite kings. He removed "the crescents that were on the necks of their camels" (Shofetim 8:21). After gathering other jewellery, Gidon fashioned a replica of the breast-plate (*ephod*) worn by the High Priest and hung it in the city.

Rabbi Moshe Alshich (d. 1593) explains that the *ephod* specifically atoned for the sin of idol worship. Gidon hoped to inspire the people to abandon the worship of foreign deities and instead to worship G-d. Yet after his death, through a turn of tragic irony the very symbol fashioned to inspire the people against idolatry became an object of worship, triggering another cycle of idolatry and suffering.



# The Five Expressions of Redemption

by Rabbi Yaakov Grunewald  
South London United Synagogue

The sidrah begins with G-d's response to Moshe's complaint that his mission to Pharaoh had failed. G-d reassured him and included in the speech five separate promises, which our Rabbis identify as the five stages of the redemption from Egypt (Shemot 6:6-8). These promises have become well known; at the Pesach Seder, we drink four cups of wine in order to represent them. The fifth cup is known as Elijah's Cup which we fill after the meal but do not drink.

The five expressions are: I **shall take you out**, I shall **save** you, I shall **redeem** you, I shall **take you** and I shall **bring you**.

These expressions are not synonymous. They describe specific stages of the liberation of the Israelites, a gradual process. The Israelites needed time to adjust to the new situation. Indeed, there were still some moments when their faith in G-d and Moshe was riddled with doubt.

In the first step of the liberation, the Almighty took the Israelites out of the suffering. The taskmasters stopped hitting them, but they remained slaves. They still had to work very hard. For this reason, they could not really appreciate the full implications of the transformation. They were in a state of shock and disbelief.

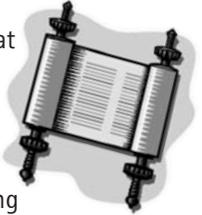
In the second stage of the liberation, it began to dawn upon the Israelites that the danger was passing. The hard work was coming to an end. Feeling a new lease of life, they had

become aware that a great miracle was happening around them.

In the third stage, the redemption started. Seeing the Egyptians, their oppressors, suffering, the Israelites were now beginning to understand that they were being elevated to a completely new spiritual status.

The fourth stage marked the moment when the Israelites were embraced by G-d. They became aware that they had been redeemed in order to become the Almighty's special nation, with a unique mission.

The fifth expression, "I shall bring you to the land", is different from the first four. The first four describe events that happened fairly quickly, paving the way to the next stage. In contrast, the fifth expression describes a historical process that is ongoing. We are still being brought back to our Land. Whilst we have seen the tremendous ingathering of the exiles and reunification of our people from all four corners of the earth, we have not all returned yet. Many Jews are still living in the Diaspora. They are not ready to make their home in Israel. That is why our Rabbis say that the time has not yet come for the drinking of the fifth cup. We call it Elijah's Cup, because when that great prophet comes to announce the arrival of the Messiah, we shall no longer merely fill up the fifth cup with wine. We will then drink it as we 'toast' our fuller return to the Land of Israel.



70 Days for  
70 Years

## Remember the Past to Build the Future

by Rabbi Nissan Wilson, Senior Rabbi, Redbridge United Synagogue

We used to walk home from shul together every Friday night and I would attempt to converse with him in Yiddish, his native tongue from his childhood days in Poland. Sometimes on these walks, Reb Baruch would turn to me in a tone somewhere between matter-of-fact and wistful and say: "Rebbe, we lost another one of our *chevra* this week."

By "our *chevra*" he meant his cohort of survivors who constituted the '45 Aid Society'. For me, these few short words were a reminder that the survivors would not be with us forever. It was a cue to savour our time with them and listen closely to their testimonies.

I recall attending a Holocaust memorial event a few years ago. There seemed to be nothing that I had not heard or seen before and the presentation had failed to move me. Even video clips of survivors telling their personal stories did not stir me. Then, the voice-over cut in with the words, "how long will they still be alive to tell their stories". I felt myself suddenly overcome with emotion, my eyes welling up with tears.

I share these recollections, not as a nostalgic reflection on the past, but as a statement of where we now stand in the continuum of Jewish history. We are on the threshold of a generational change. This is the moment when we, the second and third generation, must accept that the responsibility for telling the story of the Holocaust will soon fall to us.

The 70 for 70 Project is different in many ways

from its antecedents, the 50 for 50 and 60 for 60 projects. Aside from obviously having more essays, it is bigger in its ambition to reach as many as a million Jews. It is also broader in its scope of multimedia educational materials and related events and programmes. Much of the power of 70 for 70 lies in its positive approach and upbeat message. This project is about empowering people to engage with Jewish learning and take steps forward on their Jewish journey.



However, 70 for 70 is also a prompt to pause and reflect that a whole lifetime has passed since the Holocaust. Over the last two decades, many

survivors who had kept a life sentence of memories bottled up inside have found the courage to lift the lid and tell their stories. They felt the imperative to pass on their testimonies to the next generation.

We are the beneficiaries of that courage – we are the next generation. When our grandchildren turn to us and say, "Saba and Savta (grandpa and grandma), did you really meet someone who was in Auschwitz, did you see the number on her arm?" it will be up to us to faithfully relay the testimonies that we have heard.

The 70 for 70 Project challenges us to "remember the past to build the future". By doing this we not only remember the victims of the Holocaust but also honour them by bringing the light of Torah and mitzvot into the world.

Antonie van Leeuwenhoek (d. 1723) was not the developer of the first rudimentary microscope. However, he is the figure most closely associated with the microscope's mystique. He is credited with the discovery of micro-organisms and is considered the greatest contributor towards making the microscope an essential research and diagnostic tool. In fact, his designs for improving the microscope were not successfully replicated until 1957, over 200 years after his death.

Although the scientific and medical significance of Leeuwenhoek's work are obvious, their relevance to halacha (Jewish law) may be less obvious.

Actually, his work touches on many different aspects of Jewish law, the foremost being the status of something that can only be seen with a microscope. For example, before Succot some people check their *etrogim* for blemishes. What is the status of an *etrog* that has no noticeable blemishes, but when viewed under magnifying glass or microscope, reveals imperfections? Similarly, if one can ascertain a problem in the script of a Sefer Torah only through a magnifier, does that invalidate the Sefer Torah?

In fact, the most common halachic question

regarding microscopes arises when checking food for insects which are forbidden to eat. If one cannot detect any sign of bugs in the produce, but these may perhaps be visible through magnification, is one allowed to eat the produce?

This last question is not a new one; it was addressed hundreds of years ago. There is a minority Rabbinic opinion that if a magnifying glass can help to detect insects, one would be required to

use it to perform a proper and thorough inspection.

However, the majority of later authorities, including such luminaries as Rabbi Shlomo Kluger (d.

1869), the *Chochmat Adam* (Rabbi

Avraham Danzig, d. 1820) and the *Aruch Hashulchan* (Rabbi Yechiel Michel Epstein, d. 1908), emphatically declared that the Torah would not demand something that could not have been fulfilled at all times in history. As such, a magnifying glass or microscope could not possibly be necessary for a halachic inspection, since they have only been around for several hundred years. Additionally, those Rabbis rule that when the Torah requires an inspection, it must be the type of check that anyone can perform, without the aid of specialised instruments.

To be continued...

